

Fact Sheet: Sen. Cornyn's Work On The Valley Levees

Sen. Cornyn has been at the forefront of working with Rio Grande Valley leaders to ensure their voices are heard at the federal level. Local officials brought the possibility of dual levee use – for flood control and security – to Sen. Cornyn's attention. He then pressed federal officials to consider and adopt the proposal, and continues his efforts to ensure the project becomes a reality.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On Dec. 21, 2005, Sen. Cornyn sent a letter to the President requesting \$10 million for the Rio Grande Flood Control System Rehabilitation in his budget proposal, saying “we must continue to provide adequate funding for flood protection – which is the first line of defense against future water related natural disasters.”
- On July 11, 2007, Sen. Cornyn organized and hosted a meeting with Hidalgo and Cameron County officials, FEMA, the IBWC, and the Corps of Engineers to discuss FEMA's review of the IBWC levees. This meeting resulted in FEMA delaying the release of their preliminary flood maps giving Hidalgo County time to make repairs to their section of levees.
- On July 13, 2007, Sen. Cornyn called on FEMA to work with Valley leaders to ensure their concerns on the levee project were addressed.
- In Sept. 2007, Sen. Cornyn included an amendment to the State and Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill that required IBWC and DHS to study CBP's use of the flood control levees and any resulting damage. (Note: The amendment was stripped from the final bill.)
- On Sept. 27, 2007, Sen. Cornyn sent a letter to the Senate Appropriations Committee Chairs requesting the IBWC levees receive the maximum amount of funding in the final bill. \$10 million for the levees was included in the FY08 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, which passed the Senate last December.
- On Oct. 10, 2007, Sen. Cornyn toured the levees and hosted a roundtable discussion in Pharr, Texas. At this meeting, IBWC Commissioner Carlos Marin laid out an alternative concept of incorporating the border fence into the levee system.
- On Nov. 8, 2007, as a result of the Pharr meeting, Sen. Cornyn sent a letter to Secretary Chertoff in support of the Valley levee proposal.
- On Nov. 16, 2007, Sen. Cornyn hosted a follow-up meeting to the roundtable in Pharr to discuss the need to push for consideration of the Valley levee proposal.
- On Dec. 5, Sen. Cornyn met with Secretary Chertoff to renew his push for the Valley levee proposal.
- On Dec. 18, with Sen. Cornyn's support, the Senate passed the FY08 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, which included \$10 million for repair of the levees.
- On March 28, 2008, Sen. Cornyn Met With Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas, Cameron County Judge Carlos Cascos, Mission Mayor Beto Salinas, and other local elected officials and community leaders to announce new Levee-Repair Bill in Edinburg:
- Also on March 28, 2008, Sen. Cornyn sent a letter to the Appropriations Committee and Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs urging full consideration of flood control system.
- On April 9, 2008, Sen. Cornyn introduced S. 2832 – his Levee-Repair Bill.

- On July 14, 2008, Sen. Cornyn met with Hidalgo Officials to discuss progress on the Border-Levee Fence Project.
- On July 22, 2008, Sen. Cornyn urged Majority Leader Reid to bring the Levee-Repair Bill to the floor to protect Valley families against flooding as Dolly approached South Texas.

TIMELINE OF SEN. CORNYN'S EFFORTS ON THE VALLEY LEEVE PROPOSAL

Dec. 21, 2005: Sen. Cornyn Sent Letter To President Requesting \$10 Million For Rio Grande Flood Control System Rehabilitation In Budget Proposal:

Sen. Cornyn's Letter: "We must continue to provide adequate funding for flood protection – which is the first line of defense against future water related natural disasters. It is for this reason, I respectfully ask that you fund the United States International Boundary and Water Commission's (IBWC) Rio Grande River Flood Control System Rehabilitation Project at the level of \$10 million in your fiscal year 2007 budget request to Congress." (Sen. Cornyn, Letter To President Bush, 12/21/05)

July 11, 2007: Sen. Cornyn Met With Hidalgo And Cameron County Officials, FEMA, IBWC, And The Corps Of Engineers To Discuss The Challenges Facing the IBWC Levees:

"Sen. Cornyn Hosted A Meeting In His Washington Office With Cameron County Judge Carlos Cascos, Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas, Brownsville Mayor Pat Ahumada And Other Local Officials To Discuss The Levee Project." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn: FEMA Must Work With Valley Officials On Levee Project," Press Release, 7/13/07)

****This Meeting Resulted In FEMA Delaying The Release Of Their Preliminary Flood Maps Giving Hidalgo County Time To Make Repairs To Their Section Of Levees.****

July 13, 2007: Sen. Cornyn Called On FEMA To Work With Valley Leaders To Ensure Their Concerns On The Levee Project Were Addressed:

"Sen. John Cornyn Called On FEMA To Work With Valley Leaders To Ensure Their Concerns On The Levee Project Are Addressed. He Also Committed To Continue Fighting In Congress For Adequate Funding For Levee Repairs And Upgrades." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn: FEMA Must Work With Valley Officials On Levee Project," Press Release, 7/13/07)

- **Sen. Cornyn:** "The levee project is important to prevent flooding and protect lives, homes and property in the Rio Grande Valley. ... I am working with other members of the Texas Congressional delegation to fight for adequate funding for levee repairs and upgrades." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn: FEMA Must Work With Valley Officials On Levee Project," Press Release, 7/13/07)

Sept. 2007: Sen. Cornyn Amended The State And Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill To Require IBWC And DHS To Study CBP's Use Of The Flood Control Levees And Any Resulting Degradations:

"Sen. Cornyn Added An Amendment To The Department Of State And Foreign Operations Appropriations Bill That Required The IBWC, In Coordination With Homeland Security And The Corps Of Engineers, To Report To Congress On The Importance Of The Levees To U.S. Border Patrol, So Congress Is Aware Of The Multiple Purposes The Levees Serve." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn Asks Homeland Security Chief to Consider Proposed Valley Levee Plans," Press Release, 11/8/07)

Sept. 27, 2007: Sen. Cornyn Sent A Letter To The Senate Appropriations Committee Requesting Maximum Funding For The Levees:

"Sen. Cornyn Also Sent A Letter To The Senate Appropriations Committee Requesting The IBWC Levees Receive The Maximum Amount Of Appropriations In The Final Bill." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn Asks Homeland Security Chief to Consider Proposed Valley Levee Plans," Press Release, 11/8/07)

- **\$10 Million For The Levees Was Included In The FY08 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, Which Passed The Senate Last December.**

Sen. Cornyn's Letter: "This levee system provides critical flood control protection in a region of Texas where hurricanes and flash floods are far too common. ... It is important that the federal government provides adequate funding for flood protection – the first line of defense against future water related natural disasters." (Sen. Cornyn, Letter To Sens. Patrick Leahy And Judd Gregg, 9/27/07)

Sen. Cornyn's Letter: "As the Senate and House convene to reconcile differences in the FY08 State-Foreign Operations Appropriations bill, I respectfully ask that South Texas Levee Flood Control Rehabilitation System Project receive full consideration for the maximum amount of federal dollars possible." (Sen. Cornyn, Letter To Sens. Patrick Leahy And Judd Gregg, 9/27/07)

Oct. 10, 2007: Sen. Cornyn Toured The Levees And Hosted A Roundtable Discussion In Pharr:

"U.S. Sen. John Cornyn ... Toured The Levees Of The International Boundary And Water Commission (IBWC) Flood Control System In The Rio Grande Valley. ... Sen. Cornyn Hosted A Roundtable Discussion On The Certification Process With Local Mayors, County Officials, Border Patrol Agents, And Representatives From FEMA, The IBWC, The Department Of Homeland Security, And The U.S. Army Corps Of Engineers." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn Hosts Roundtable On Valley Levees," Press Release, 10/10/07)

- **Sen. Cornyn:** "Not only are the levees a critical safety measure against flooding, they also serve the U.S. Border Patrol as they seek to monitor and secure the border." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn Hosts Roundtable On Valley Levees," Press Release, 10/10/07)

****It Was At This Meeting That IBWC Commissioner Carlos Marin Laid Out An Alternative Concept Of Incorporating The Border Fence Into The Levee System.****

Nov. 8, 2007: Sen. Cornyn Sent A Letter To Secretary Chertoff In Support Of The Valley Levee Proposal:

"U.S. Sen. John Cornyn ... Sent A Letter To U.S. Department Of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff, Requesting That He Give Due Consideration To A Proposal To Incorporate The Levees Of The International Boundary And Water Commission (IBWC) As DHS Moves Forward With Border Fencing Plans Under The Secure Fence Act." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn Asks Homeland Security Chief to Consider Proposed Valley Levee Plans," Press Release, 11/8/07)

Nov. 16, 2007: Sen. Cornyn Met With Valley Officials To Get An Update On The Progress Of The Valley Levee Proposal:

"U.S. Sen. John Cornyn ... Hosted A Meeting In The U.S. Capitol With Cameron And Hidalgo County Judges To Discuss The Need To Push For Consideration Of The Levee Proposal. The Meeting Comes As A Follow-Up To A Roundtable Discussion He Held In Pharr Last Month." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn Meets With Valley Officials To Discuss Levee, Fence," Press Release, 11/16/07)

Dec. 5, 2007: Sen. Cornyn Met With Secretary Chertoff, Where He Renewed His Push For The Valley Levee Proposal:

"U.S. Sen. John Cornyn ... Met With U.S. Department Of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Michael Chertoff In A Renewed Effort To Urge The Secretary To Consider A Valley Levee Proposal Sen. Cornyn Had Brought To His Attention Earlier This Year." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Cornyn Meets With Homeland Security Chief, Makes Renewed Push For Valley Levee Proposal & Consultation On Fence," Press Release, 12/5/07)

Dec. 18, 2007: Sen. Cornyn Voted For The FY08 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, Which Included \$10 Million For Repair Of The Levees:

On Dec. 18, With Sen. Cornyn's Support, The Senate Passed The FY08 Omnibus Appropriations Bill, Which Included \$10 Million For Repair Of The Levees. (H.R. 2764, CQ Vote #441: Motion Agreed To 76-17: R 33-14; D 41-3; I 2-0, 12/18/07, Cornyn Voted Yea)

March 28, 2008: Sen. Cornyn Met With Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas, Cameron County Judge Carlos Cascos, Mission Mayor Beto Salinas, And Other Local Elected Officials And Community Leaders To Announce New Levee-Repair Bill In Edinburg:

"Sen. John Cornyn ... Visited Edinburg To Announce New Legislation He Will Introduce ... To Authorize The International Boundary And Water Commission (IBWC) To Reimburse Hidalgo And Cameron Counties For Expenses They Incur In Designing, Constructing, And Rehabilitating The Levees As Part Of The Lower Rio Grande Valley Flood Control Project." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Sen. Cornyn Announces New Bill To Ensure Flood Control Reimbursements For Hidalgo, Cameron Counties," Press Release, 3/28/08)

"Sen. Cornyn Was Joined By Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas, Cameron County Judge Carlos Cascos, Mission Mayor Beto Salinas, And Other Local Elected Officials And Community Leaders. Sen. Cornyn Will Also Support Efforts To Secure Funding For The Project Through The Appropriations Process." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Sen. Cornyn Announces New Bill To Ensure Flood Control Reimbursements For Hidalgo, Cameron Counties," Press Release, 3/28/08)

Sen. Cornyn: "I'm pleased to announce that I plan on introducing federal legislation next week authorizing the International Boundary and Water Commission to reimburse these Valley counties for this essential project." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Sen. Cornyn Announces New Bill To Ensure Flood Control Reimbursements For Hidalgo, Cameron Counties," Press Release, 3/28/08)

- **Note: Local Leaders Behind Levee-Repair Bill:**

- **Cameron County Judge Carlos H. Cascos:** "I'm very pleased with Sen. Cornyn's visit to the Valley once again. Our community also gladly welcomes Sen. Cornyn's announcement that he will be introducing legislation to allow the International Boundary and Water Commission to reimburse Cameron and Hidalgo counties for any costs incurred with repairs to the levees. Had it not been for the tenacity of Senator Cornyn, this important step would not be taking place. I'm proud of the fact that my Senator has stepped up to the plate, and now it is time for the House of Representatives to do the same."
- **Hidalgo County Judge J.D. Salinas:** "Sen. John Cornyn understands that the levees are a federal responsibility and that it's time for Congress to step up. Our hard-working citizens and small business owners should not have to be placed in the position of having to choose between buying health insurance for families and employees or coughing up hundreds of dollars a year for mandatory flood insurance. Fixing the levees is the best economic stimulus for this area, to keep us moving ahead toward a bright and prosperous future."

March 28, 2008: Sen. Cornyn Sent Letter To Appropriations Committee And Subcommittee On State, Foreign Operations And Related Programs Urging Full Consideration Of Flood Control System:

Sen. Cornyn's Letter: "I would appreciate your help in assuring that the Lower Rio Grande Valley Levee Flood Control Project is fairly considered in the Subcommittee markup and receives full consideration for the maximum amount of federal dollars possible." (Sen. Cornyn, Letter To Sens. Robert Byrd And Thad Cochran, Patrick Leahy And Judd Gregg, 9/27/07)

April 9, 2008: Sen. Cornyn Introduced His Levee-Repair Bill:

Sen. Cornyn Introduced S. 2832 – "A Bill To Authorize The International Boundary And Water Commission To Reimburse State And Local Governments For Expenses Incurred By Such Governments In Designing, Constructing, And Rehabilitating The Lower Rio Grande Valley Flood Control Project." (Library Of Congress Website, thomas.loc.gov, 4/9/08)

The Bill Is Currently In The Senate Committee On Foreign Relations. (Library Of Congress Website, thomas.loc.gov, 4/9/08)

July 14, 2008: Sen. Cornyn Met With Hidalgo Officials To Discuss Progress On Border-Levee Fence Project:

"U.S. Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, Hosted A Meeting In His Capitol Hill Office Today With Hidalgo County Commissioners To Discuss The Current Status Of The Border-Levee Fence Project." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Sen. Cornyn Meets With Hidalgo Officials To Discuss Progress On Border Levee-Fence Project," Press Release, 7/14/08)

Sen. Cornyn: "The levees are a critical safety measure against flooding, and they also help the U.S. Border Patrol as they seek to monitor and secure the border. I'm committed to doing everything I can on the federal level to ensure the border-levee project is built in a timely, efficient and responsible manner." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Sen. Cornyn Meets With Hidalgo Officials To Discuss Progress On Border Levee-Fence Project," Press Release, 7/14/08)

July 22, 2008: Sen. Cornyn Urges Majority Leader Reid To Bring Levee-Repair Bill To The Floor To Protect Valley Families Against Flooding:

"U.S. Sen. John Cornyn ... Wrote To Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid Urging Him To Pass Legislation Sen. Cornyn Introduced In April That Would Allow County Governments In The Lower Rio Grande Valley To Make Immediate Repairs To Their Outdated Levee System, And Be Reimbursed By The Federal Government At A Later Date." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Sen. Cornyn Urges Senate Leader To Bring Levee-Repair Bill To The Floor To Protect Valley Families Against Flooding," Press Release, 7/22/08)

Sen. Cornyn's Letter: "As Tropical Storm (soon to be Hurricane) Dolly approaches South Texas, I urge you to help advance legislation I introduced in April of this year to allow the counties of the Lower Rio Grande Valley to quickly make much-needed flood control improvements to local levees." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Sen. Cornyn Urges Senate Leader To Bring Levee-Repair Bill To The Floor To Protect Valley Families Against Flooding," Press Release, 7/22/08)

Sen. Cornyn's Letter: "My legislation (S. 2832) would allow local governments to immediately fund levee repairs, while ensuring that Valley taxpayers are not left on the hook for what is properly a federal responsibility. I would greatly appreciate your support in quickly moving this critical flood control measure through the Senate for consideration." (Sen. John Cornyn, "Sen. Cornyn Urges Senate Leader To Bring Levee-Repair Bill To The Floor To Protect Valley Families Against Flooding," Press Release, 7/22/08)